

# Communal Violence and Ethnic Polarisation before and after the 2015 Elections in Turkey: Attacks against the HDP and the Kurdish Population

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## **Communal Violence and Ethnic Polarisation before and after the 2015 Elections in Turkey: Attacks against the HDP and the Kurdish Population**

Francis O'Connor and Bahar Baser

*Given its duration and intensity, the decades-old civil war in Turkey between the Turkish state and the PKK has resulted in relatively low levels of lethal inter-communal conflict between Kurdish and Turkish populations. However, around the June 2015 elections an unprecedented wave of systematic anti-Kurdish violence swept across western Turkey. The paper will assess these events in relation to literature on communal riots and electoral violence. It will consider the impact of state led anti-Kurdish discourse and the growth of the HDP, as potential factors that aggravated the dormant tensions and laid the groundwork for wide-spread inter-communal violence.*

*Key words: HDP, communal violence, Turkey, Kurdish Question, electoral violence*

## Introduction

The period since the summer of 2015 has seen the collapse of the peace negotiations between the Turkish government and the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan / Kurdistan Workers' Party*), the resumption of PKK attacks, the devastation of the urban centres in South-eastern Turkey, resulting in thousands of internally displaced persons and casualties, a series of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) bomb attacks, a failed coup attempt, which paved the way to massive censorship and a clampdown on the freedom of expression of journalists and academics, and the entrenchment of powers in an ever more authoritarian President Erdoğan (see Akkoyunlu and Öktem 2016, Baser and Öztürk 2017). These developments serve as the context in which we analyse the rise of communal violence directed both specifically against the HDP (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi/The People's Democratic Party*) and more broadly against Turkey's Kurdish population in the period leading up the general election in June 2015 and its aftermath until the snap elections in November.

The conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state is one of the world's most enduring civil wars, dating from 1984, albeit with intermittent PKK ceasefires. It has resulted in over 40,000 deaths and millions of internally displaced people and international refugees. Much bitterness has been evinced by the conflict, not only in the theatre of armed operations which is mostly confined to the south-eastern Kurdish region but throughout the Turkish state. These conflict dynamics have also diffused transnationally and have been noted among the Kurdish and Turkish diaspora groups in several European states (Baser 2015). Notwithstanding these tensions, there has been a comparatively low level of supplementary inter-ethnic violence between Kurdish and Turkish civilians in Turkey (Borsuk 2016). In fact, the large majority of deaths have been within the ranks of the PKK or the Turkish armed forces and its affiliated paramilitary groups (Tezcür 2015). A 2013 Turkish government report asserted that from 1984 to 2013, 5,557 civilians had been killed in the course of the conflict, along with 2,872 extra-judicial killings and a further 1,945 victims of unknown assailants (TBMM İnsan Haklarını İnceleme Komisyonu 2013). The criteria used to define civilians and why they were differentiated from victims of extra-judicial killings and those killed by unknown assassins is not clear. Nevertheless, in comparison to other recent civil wars in, for example, Algeria and Sri Lanka, the proportion of civilian casualties is low, at less than a quarter (if one includes all

three sets of victims in the report) of overall conflict deaths. This is in part due to the fact that the Kurdish movement in Turkey has discouraged inter-communal violence and there have been relatively few explicitly anti-civilian attacks committed by groups affiliated to the PKK (see Masullo and O'Connor 2017; Gürses 2010). The lack of inter-communal violence at mass scale is surprising when one considers that the state's most successful counter-insurgent tactic was the forced displacement of around two million Kurds, with many of those relocating to the large urban centres of western Turkey (see Jongerden 2007, 223). The Turkish state's refusal to recognise Kurds as a distinct ethnicity and assess violent casualties accordingly, has ensured that there are no authoritative statistics on Kurdish victims of communal violence.

Recent studies show that this relatively limited incidence of communal violence might be changing. Zeynep Gambetti claims that there were more than 130 lynching attempts and mob violence against leftists and Kurds in Turkey from 2005 to 2013 (2013, 126). She observed that this surge in communal violence only increased when the PKK's military power had in relative terms, declined (2013, 128). She underlines that since the early 2000s 'citizens were now taking onto themselves the responsibility of policing dissenters and would-be enemies' and that 'civil society, armed with patriotic values, was rushing to fill in the gap presumably left open by the state' (Gambetti 2013, 128). Although intercommunal violence had been reduced during the peace process in Turkey, it escalated quickly after the collapse of the process and around the beginning of the 2015 election campaigns. This escalation merits attention to understand its underlying motivations in order to assess future peace prospects for Turkey. Research has confirmed that there were at least, 600 acts of communal violence between 1999 and 2012 (Borsuk 2016, 131), as well as a further 120 attacks prior to the June 2015 election (Güngör 2016, 1) which was followed by a further upsurge in attacks during the summer of 2015. As of yet, there is insufficient research to ascertain whether these attacks were spontaneous or systematic and to determine the extent of the state's role in them. However, the intensification of patterns of communal violence suggests ever increasing levels of polarization between two communities.

In this article, we mapped the attacks against the HDP and Kurdish individuals, specifically focusing on the period between before the elections of June 2015 and afterwards until the snap elections of November 2015. We argue that, the targeting of the HDP in 2015 was not spontaneous. The attacks were systematic and designed to pre-empt and subsequently limit further electoral growth of the HDP. These attacks not only inhibited the HDP's election

campaigns but also significantly damaged its strategy of reaching beyond its established Kurdish constituency, which was its core objective in the 2015 election (Grigoriadis and Dilek 2018, 298). The violence was enabled by the longer term evolution of Turkish nationalist discourse which has begun to frame the Kurds as ethnic outsiders or ‘pseudo-citizens’ rather than the previous modernist understanding of Kurds as ‘future Turks’ (Yeğen 2009). The broader hostility to Kurds is derived from what Saraçoğlu (2009) has defined as ‘exclusive recognition’ wherein Kurds have acquired quotidian and politically sanctioned negative stereotypes. This ethnic polarisation has been exacerbated by an environment of impunity, whereby perpetrators of attacks against Kurds are likely to avoid prosecution, resultant from a system of institutional enablement by juridical and political authorities. These waves of violence against Kurdish targets have not been sincerely condemned by state authorities or pro-government media organs.<sup>1</sup> Only in a few exceptional cases, have rival parties expressed any disapproval of the violence. Many Turkish politicians have promoted an ‘understanding approach’ to this behaviour, emphasising the ‘patriotic’ motivations of the Turkish population impelled to protect their state and its territorial integrity, which Şahin-Fırat (2014, 400) has called an act of ‘subcontracting’ state violence to the ‘sensitive citizen’. In fact, there are numerous examples in Erdoğan’s and other politicians’ speeches in which they state that the nation’s patience has limits or that these attacks can be attributed to ‘people’s sensitivity’ (Gambetti 2013, 13).

There is also a strong transnational or pan-Kurdish element to the spiralling communal tensions. The importance and emotional salience of transnational ties and a shared identity between Kurds in Turkey and Syria has been well documented (Gürses 2015). Therefore, it was no surprise in late 2014, when it seemed likely that the Kurdish city of Kobanî would fall to a massive ISIS onslaught, widespread clashes between sympathisers of the Kurdish movement and Islamists erupted in several Kurdish cities in Turkey. It was widely perceived that the Turkish government had supported ISIS and was impeding any pan-Kurdish efforts to alleviate the siege of Kobanî (Gourlay 2017, 8–12). Unsurprisingly, this led many Kurds in Turkey to doubt the sincerity of the Turkish government’s commitment to the peace process.

The toleration of discrimination and violence by the authorities has in part contributed to a defensive assertiveness amongst Kurds, including Kurds in western Turkey, whereby the formerly suppressed Kurdish identity is ever more openly expressed, as exemplified by voting for the HDP or its predecessor parties, openly embracing Kurdish culture including its

language and in some cases by supporting the PKK's armed struggle. The incumbent Turkish government and its affiliated Ottoman Hearths youth groups, as well as the MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*/Nationalist Movement Party)<sup>ii</sup>, have seized on this shift in discourse against the Kurds and some groups linked to these organizations have launched low level but territorially extensive armed and unarmed attacks against Kurdish targets around the 2015 elections. The violence and the state's complicity in it, has led to a re-consolidation of more militant elements in the broader Kurdish political spectrum, as evidenced by the abrogation of the PKK ceasefire and the consolidation of Kurdish urban youth militias YDG-H (*Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareketi*/Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement).<sup>iii</sup>

This paper builds on theoretical foundations of the literature on electoral violence (Tezcür 2015; Höglund 2009; Staniland 2014) and research on communal violence (Wilkinson 2005; Varshney 2003; Brass 2011; Horowitz 2001). Although, our paper is limited to the violence in the period around the elections in 2015, we argue that the eruption of communal violence reflects developments which go beyond the widespread instrumentalisation of ethno-religious cleavages for vote maximisation in elections in multi-ethnic authoritarian democracies (Horowitz 2001, 235). The majority of violence occurred in western and central regions, where with the limited exceptions of the larger cities, the HDP was unlikely to have obtained seats. In areas where the HDP was strongest and competition with the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*/Justice and Development Party) keenest, mostly in largely Kurdish populated areas, there were very limited instances of violence.<sup>iv</sup> This paper therefore argues that the violence was not solely a result of rational machinations around seat maximisation. We surmise that if the attacks were limited to the objective of hindering HDP's success in elections, violence would have been correlated to areas of closest electoral competition (in Kurdish majority areas where the AKP is the HDP's biggest rival).<sup>v</sup> Our findings show that there was limited correlation between tight electoral competition and violence. They also demonstrate numerous attacks against Kurdish civilians, independent of the attacks on the HDP. Accordingly, the article puts forth the argument that the violence was a result of an emergent and increasingly virulent antipathy towards Turkey's Kurdish population. We conclude by suggesting that the dramatic intensification of the violence in 2015 was related to the unusual instance of two elections in a calendar year and electoral campaigning served as proximate triggers for violence, but that it also reflects a broader tendency toward communal polarisation in Turkey in recent years.

The first half of the article summarises the literature on communal and electoral violence, then proceeds to outline the article's methodology and describe our process of data collection. It gives a summary of the changing nature of Turkish nationalism and how it addresses the country's Kurdish population. The rest of the article details the immediate context of the violence, the breakdown of the peace process and the upsurge of violence against Kurdish targets. It distinguishes between the two patterns of violence in this period; firstly, violence which focused on HDP related targets, highlighting one particularly well-organised attack on HDP and Kurdish targets in the town of Kırşehir. The second form of violence is more generalised and targeted Kurds regardless of actual political orientation. Our paper will conclude by arguing that in combination with the consolidation of power in the office of Turkish President, the suspension of democratic processes and accountability and the deliberate communal polarisation of Kurds and Turks, that the likelihood of further inter-ethnic violence is more probable in the near future considering the simmering communal mistrust.

## **Methodology**

This article is based on a systematic analysis of media reports in a cross sample of Turkish newspapers between January and December 2015. We have chosen online and offline pro-government as well as critical media outlets<sup>vi</sup> in an effort to capture data from across the media-political spectrum. Although, we were cognisant of the weaknesses of such a method with regards to representativeness and media outlets' own selection bias (Franzosi 1987; Mügge 2016; Castelli Gattinara 2016), it remains a useful tool to assess the diffusion of patterns of violence and more importantly how they are publicly reported. We systematically searched for any mention of violence directed against HDP members or party offices and ordinary Kurds, if the inter-ethnic nature of the clashes was reported. Our research assistant collected and coded this data systematically, according to type of violence, location and perpetrators. We found 140 reports; however, this is certainly an underrepresentation because many Kurds do not formally report such attacks due to their fears of retribution from the authorities. Even the instances that are formally recorded by state institutions, are mostly not reported by the media due to a combination of ideological bias by the pro-state media (Borsuk 2016) and harsh repression on media outlets sympathetic to Kurdish issues. We have also received access to digital maps created by HDP members in Istanbul, which gave us an opportunity to cross check our results.<sup>vii</sup> We have also cross-checked our results with reports

that are prepared specifically on this topic by local NGOs.<sup>viii</sup> Notwithstanding the limitations of such methods, we found evidence that anti-Kurdish violence dramatically increased in the period analysed and that it was distributed across Turkey.

Ideally, this would be complemented by field research with relevant actors (HDP officials, victims of the attacks and potentially also organisations suspected of involvement in the violence) but that was unfortunately not possible in light of the clampdown on signatories of the Academics for Peace petition and under the state of emergency conditions. During the time we conducted this research, several HDP's elected mayor and politicians had been arrested and charged with terrorism. In partial compensation, we electronically contacted a number of HDP officials, conducting interviews with five members and had numerous 'off the record' discussions with many who felt it better, in light of the prevailing climate in 2016/2017, to avoid formal interviews. We have also made use of the multiple reports published by the HDP and national and international NGOs on the violence.<sup>ix</sup>

### **Communal Violence and Elections**

Horowitz (2001, 1) has argued that all episodes of communal violence have an immediate cause, 'triggered by events – precipitants – that are regarded as sufficient to warrant violence'. These precipitants can be engineered or clandestinely committed by actors in order to further their own personal or political interests. This point reinforces Brubaker's argument that ethnic conflict is not between ethnic groups themselves but rather ethnic actors claiming to represent or have a form of mandate from said groups (2002, 166). Previous research has confirmed that the prioritisation of an ethnic conflict analytical frame, tends to downplay intra-ethnic heterogeneity marked by sub-regional divisions for e.g. between different cities (Uluğ et al. 2017) within political parties and between mass and elite perspectives (Uluğ and Cohrs 2017b). A Human Rights Watch report claimed that ethnic violence is commonly caused by political elites who 'play on existing communal tensions to entrench [their] own power or advance a political agenda' (in Wilkinson 2005, 2). These political machinations can occur at both the national or constituency level (Wilkinson 2005, 1).

In light of the general impunity which surrounds instances of mass violence, identifying or attributing responsibility to culpable actors is difficult (Horowitz 2001, 224). Accordingly, on occasion one must infer greater or lesser degrees of organisation from the



tactics and geography of the violence deployed (ibid. 227-228). Staniland has provided a simple template to facilitate a disaggregation of political actors involved in electoral violence: ‘state security forces, non-state actors linked to the regime, non-state opposition groups, and politically unaligned local groups’ (2014, 107). They can operate with varying logics ranging from simply enhancing one side’s chances of winning the election to an anti-systemic logic opposed in principle to violence (Staniland 2014, 108). Mass violence can be used by political actors as a means of outflanking party rivals and enhancing nationalist or radical credibility (Horowitz 2001, 238). Patterns of ethnic conflict also vary temporarily, and violence can occur during the elections themselves or more commonly prior to the vote as a means of conditioning the outcome and/or post-electorally due to dissatisfaction with the outcome (Höglund 2009). The chronological parameters can also blend into one another; post-election violence can in fact – as in the Turkish case – be oriented toward the next election rather than concluded one.

Recent research on insurgent groups’ participation in electoral processes posits that in certain contexts, elections can become a focal point for violence (Matanock 2017, 95). It has been argued that ‘elections and coercion can be enduringly compatible’ (Staniland 2014, 100). The case of electoral violence in this paper differs from the focus on insurgent engagement in elections primarily because the PKK does not have an institutional political party and does not participate in elections. The HDP is commonly accused of being a PKK proxy and serving as terrorists in the parliament.<sup>x</sup> In simple terms, the PKK does not have a structural relationship or any hierarchical control over the HDP. Yet, they do have a shared political vision inspired by the ideology of Democratic Confederalism, some degree of interpersonal and familial ties between them and most importantly a shared experience of Turkish counter-insurgency and decades of neglect and political repression (see O’Connor 2017). Importantly, the PKK had been on ceasefire in the lead-up to the June 2015. It returned to violence following the June election, in reaction to the Turkish’s government’s recalcitrance regarding the peace process and its complicity in attacks on the Kurdish movement in Rojava and the targeting of the HDP in a series of bomb attacks throughout 2015. Additionally, the seeming shift toward the dominance of the HDP at the expense of the previously hegemonic PKK in Kurdish society had resulted in unprecedentedly public tensions between the HDP and elements of the PKK.<sup>xi</sup> Nonetheless, even in the lead-up to the November 2015 elections after the PKK ceasefire had ended, neither the PKK nor groups affiliated to it carried out any form

of violence against political opponents of the HDP. Accordingly, the violence was unidirectionally directed against HDP targets or Kurds, more generally.

Electoral violence also displays much spatial variation. Firstly, it is most commonly an urban phenomenon and the local balance of political power and political culture render some cities more prone to these clashes than others (Varshney 2003, 6–8). Sites of recurrent electoral and communal violence are commonly related to the perception of ethnic block voting and local competition for seats, which as will be highlighted, is not the case in Turkey. Furthermore, it has been argued that states ultimately determine whether electoral tensions turn violent or not. State responsibility derives from the argument that governments tend to protect minorities if they are electorally dependent on them. In situations where governments or large parties do not need the votes of ethnic or religious others, there is no electoral incentive to its impediment (Varshney & Gubler 2012, 193). As Varshney and Gubler (2012, 191) argue: ‘If only the state wanted to prevent riots, [...], its hold over the police would allow it to do so. It is the electoral calculations of the politicians in power, and the benefits they perceive from violence, that stop the state from containing riots.’

Other institutional factors such as the number of parties, the type of electoral system and the ongoing presence of armed insurgents can also increase the likelihood of communal violence at elections (Höglund 2009). As does the presence or absence of institutionalised systems of riot production, which even if they remain inactive can be easily re-activated to produce a violent performative repertoire around elections or at other times of perceived necessity (Brass 2004). In Brass’ terms, ‘the fire-tenders’ are readily available for participation in riots and they have an interest in sustaining communal tensions. As the communal violence becomes an institutional part of the conflict landscape, individual cases of violent encounters can be quickly altered into narratives of communal conflict, especially by the media and the state authorities (Young 2003, 15).

### **Evolution of Turkish Nationalism and the Changed Discursive Context**

In addition to denying the collective ethno-religious identity of the non-Turkish peoples of Turkey, the 1924 constitution also drew a distinction between ‘Turks as such’ and ‘Constitutional Turks’. The former were all Muslims<sup>xii</sup> on the territory of Turkey while the latter included the non-Muslim peoples. Constitutional Turks were ‘outwardly subject to the

discriminatory practices of citizenship’ and never candidates for assimilation to becoming real Turks (Yeğen 2009, 608). The Kurdish population on the other hand were Muslims and therefore potential Turks. Kurdish opposition to compulsory assimilation in the early years of the Republic was not countenanced as the consequence of a differing national identity but simply the reluctance of a tribal and backward people to submit to a modern state (Yeğen 2007). In subsequent decades, Kurdish opposition was classed as the fruit of the machinations of outside instigators, as heterogeneous as the Americans, Communists or Armenians. This perception of international instigation of the conflict remains salient amongst certain segments of Turkish society (Uluğ et al. 2017). Nevertheless, the Kurds were perceived on a whole as misled and manipulated, but potentially redeemable ‘future Turks’ (Yeğen 2007: 137).

Recent years have witnessed a change in this discourse. A change provoked by the evident failure of state assimilationist policies and a burgeoning and increasingly uncowed Kurdish identity, evident not only in largely Kurdish populated areas in South-eastern Turkey but also amongst Kurds resident in the cities of Western Turkey. Kurdish reluctance to assimilate has undermined their popular perception as the state’s ‘country cousins’ bound to become good Turks under the guidance of the benevolent Turkish state. They are ever increasingly identified as an unredeemable ‘other’. Ergin (2014) has argued that this is a form of racialisation, where Kurds have been extirpated from the bounds of the so-called Turkish race. As outsiders, they are said to possess a whole array of negative social and behavioural characteristics but also physical attributes. As a Turkish respondent in Saraçoğlu’s (2011, 156) study declared: ‘When you hear the way they speak, you can easily realise who they are. Or you can immediately get this from their face and appearance’.

This evolution has been described by as ‘exclusive recognition’ (Saraçoğlu 2009). He argues that there are a number of stages to this process. Firstly, Kurds were recognised as a different people at the macro-level. This is reflected in acknowledgement by the political elite of the Kurdish question, dating back to former Prime Minister Turgut Özal’s Kurdish opening in the early 1990s to the AKP’s Kurdish Initiative in 2009. Secondly, this explicit acknowledgement of difference has also taken the form of negative stereotyping of Kurds, as criminals, violent, poor, uneducated and dirty (see Saraçoğlu 2009; Ergin 2014; Müderrisoğlu 2006). A survey conducted in 2009, by a pro-government think tank called SETA, revealed that although Turks and Kurds are likely to have friendly relations, more than 70% of Turkish

respondents thought that Kurds want a separate state; therefore they wanted to divide Turkey.<sup>xiii</sup> Another recent study on inter-ethnic tolerance between Turks and Kurds found that Kurds were more tolerant towards Turks than vice versa (Sarigil and Karakoç 2017). Saraçoğlu (2009, 642) claims that this negative stereotyping is not directed toward other minority groups and that Kurds are the *exclusive* targets of these hostile attitudes. The exclusivity of this hostility can be questioned in light of evidence of violence directed against the Roma community (Karakoç 2011; Erman & Eken 2004), ongoing animosity toward Armenians and other Christians and more recently against asylum seekers and refugees.<sup>xiv</sup> It is clear that the changed parameters of Turkish nationalism have begun to position Kurds as outsiders. This is visible at the political level but also at the popular level where on a quotidian basis Kurds are negatively stereotyped which, in turn conditions most interactions between Kurds and Turks in western Turkey. A direct consequence of this evolution has been the increasing tolerance of violence directed not only against Kurdish political opponents but also for ordinary Kurds on the simple basis of their Kurdishness.

It is well established in the literature on violence around elections, that in conflict societies, elections can in fact polarise communal cleavages (Höglund 2009, 419; Brubaker and Laitin 1998; Staniland 2014). This was particularly pertinent for the 2015 election, because the HDP was running as a party for the first time rather than using the strategy of fielding independent candidates to avoid falling under the 10 percent electoral threshold for political parties (but not for independent candidates). The Turkish electoral system re-distributes the votes accumulated by parties under the threshold to the next biggest party favouring the bigger parties, which is usually the AKP in the Kurdish region (see Tezcür 2015). The HDP campaigned on a state-wide basis but not with the objective of obtaining seats in each district. Its overall goal was to pass the 10 per cent threshold, which is calculated on the basis of the totality of votes gathered in the election (see Canyaş, Canyaş & Gümrükçü 2016, 80). Accordingly, it sought to obtain every single possible vote even in constituencies where there was little chance of winning a seat. Conversely, the AKP and other nationalist circles were determined to keep the HDP below the threshold and sought to limit HDP votes in every district (Grigoriadis 2016, 40).

According to one HDP official we interviewed, the party was cognisant of the risks of not passing the threshold but were confident that they could achieve it. The party concentrated its efforts on two electoral demographics; the anti-AKP middle classes, traditionally CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi / Republican People's Party) voters, particularly those that had been

sympathetic to the struggle for Gezi Park and AKP voting Kurds dismayed with the derailment of the peace process (Personal Interview, 22 November 2016). The HDP's efforts to capitalise on the political effervescence of the post-Gezi period have divided opinion: some argue that the HDP maintained an ambiguous position on the campaign (Grigoriadis 2016, 41) while Göksel and Tekdemir (2017) attribute much of the HDP's growth to its capacity to harness its energies. Polls prior to the election suggested that the HDP would indeed pass the threshold thus depriving the AKP of its usual seat bonus vis-à-vis its share of the popular vote. The AKP would thus have been short of the two thirds majority needed to pass its desired constitutional amendments which were central to its electoral campaign (Kemahloğlu 2015, 451). Considering that one of the HDP's election campaign slogans was 'We will not make you the President!' [referring to Erdoğan], it is obvious that the elections were seen as critical for constitutional change in Turkey. Therefore, the competition was not solely for seats but rather the power to fundamentally restructure Turkey's political institutions

These changed electoral realities resulted in the AKP shifting its position in relation to the HDP and the peace process. It repudiated the Dolmabahçe Accord which provided a framework for a negotiated peace with the PKK and embraced a discourse which explicitly vilified the HDP and the Kurdish population that was sympathetic to the party as terrorist sympathisers (see Kose 2017; Sunca 2017; Rumelili and Çelik 2017; Baser 2017). Other parties quickly followed suit, persistently emphasising the HDP's alleged links to the PKK. The underlying logic of which, was to prove that the HDP was a political pawn of a 'terrorist organization'. The HDP was constantly denigrated at election rallies, in the media and in debates. Although, Uluğ and Cohrs (2017a) have pointed out that there are internal party divergences regarding the Kurdish conflict, certainly representing greater heterogeneity than the uniformly adversarial stance in the Turkish parliament in the 1990s (Loizides 2009, 283), the main parliamentary parties enthusiastically reverted to reckless anti-Kurdish rhetoric in order to maximise votes. As a consequence, the perpetrators of attacks against the HDP justified their actions as protecting the country from terrorists (Sözeri 2015). Elite level discourse had cynically blurred the distinction between the PKK and non-violent Kurdish actors and between politically mobilised Kurds and Kurds in general.

### **Pre- and Post-Election Attacks on the HDP**

The Human Rights Association (İHD) in Turkey prepared a detailed report about pre-election violence [between 23 March and 19 May 2015] in Turkey before the 7 June elections in 2015. According to this report, there were 126 election related attacks in Turkey: 114 against the HDP, 7 against the AKP, 4 against the CHP and 1 against the MHP. 49 people were physically harmed during these attacks and 47 of them were HDP members or sympathizers. Among the attacks against the HDP there were 2 bomb, 3 gun and 2 arson attacks.<sup>xv</sup> Firstly, these statistics show that the HDP did not compete with other parties under similar conditions in a fair and secure election environment. Secondly, these attacks completely undermined the HDP's election campaigns in certain cities due to fears over the security of its officials. The report also claimed that 125 HDP sympathizers were taken into custody during the election campaigns.<sup>xvi</sup> As in many cases of communal violence, a culture of impunity prevailed wherein the authorities tasked with protecting the victims of attacks are either unwilling to intervene or actively participated in the violence (Horowitz 2001, 359). In such environments, perpetrators are also unlikely to face retrospective punishment for their behaviour thus further emboldening rioters. In a press declaration, the İHD stated that they had urged state officials on numerous occasions to act on these crimes; however, nothing was done to prevent them. Not only were they not prevented, their number intensified towards the election day.<sup>xvii</sup> In addition, bans prohibited HDP marches and rallies and several party buildings were forced to close because of official orders from local governorates.<sup>xviii</sup> If one considers that election violence can be interpreted as election fraud since it might be a way to distort election results (Höglund 2009, 415), the June elections cannot be considered as fair.

The violence against the HDP was extensive and systematic and not confined to areas where there was constituency level electoral competition. Much of it occurred in central and Western Anatolia in cities like Niğde, Bilecik, Bartın and Konya, where the HDP had minimal possibilities of obtaining a seat.<sup>xix</sup> The MHP and especially its youth wing commonly known as Grey Wolves or *Ülkücüs*, closely resemble Brass' Institutional Riot System (2004, 1996) and the 'fire-tenders' he describes. Grey Wolves were implicated in the Alevi massacres of the 1970s and are consistently engaged in acts of political violence, particularly in universities against leftists and other minorities. Groups like the Grey Wolves and their AKP counterparts, the Ottoman Hearths remain active even in periods of relative political calm, serving to socialize and identify violent youths which are subsequently deployed in periods of tension, such as the 2015 elections and during the 2016 coup attempt. The MHP used attacks on the HDP to signal to its supporters that it had not diluted its

nationalism, to avoid losing votes to the AKP which had begun to re-position itself further to the right. MHP activists have not hidden their complicity in these attacks and in fact even proudly boasted of them via social media and their party websites.<sup>xx</sup> However, HDP officials also claim that some of these groups were active members of the AKP.<sup>xxi</sup> The violence perpetrated by groups affiliated to the governing party and their ideological allies can be understood as a form of privatisation of state violence where regimes attempt to weaken political rivals but maintain a degree of plausible deniability for the excesses of the violence (Staniland 2014, 109).

These violent attacks were combined with other types of antagonistic campaigning against the HDP. Property owners refused to rent their buildings to the HDP for their election campaign.<sup>xxii</sup> There were social media campaigns on Facebook, under the banners ‘We do not want HDP in XXX [a city name]’<sup>xxiii</sup> and ‘Love or leave it [Turkey]’. The party was stigmatized by a counter-mobilisation which seemed to be bottom-up as well as top-down. Shop keepers refused to sell goods to HDP members, the state and municipal officials would bureaucratically impede the holding of HDP rallies, and arson, and assault also occurred. The culture of impunity as previously outlined, before and after the elections seemed to sanction such acts. As Borsuk (2016,144) argues: ‘People who would be afraid to break legal rules at normal times dare to participate in group beatings or looting because they feel omnipotent as a mob and probably think that security forces will be empathetic to them or at least will not intervene.’ She further suggests that perpetrators of violent acts against Kurds were not only ultra-nationalist groups like *Ülkücüs* or *Alperens*<sup>xxiv</sup>, but also ordinary civilians (2016,133). This clearly shows that ethnic polarisation, along with both spontaneous and non-spontaneous communal violence had risen.

The İHD has declared that the state officials ignored the systematic nature of the attacks by dismissing them as spontaneous occurrences.<sup>xxv</sup> The HDP and the İHD’s analysis of the situation concur with Wilkinson’s observations of riots in the Indian context. He argues that presence or absence of riots depends ‘primarily on the will and capacity of the government that controls the forces of law and order’ (Wilkinson 2005, 5). And in a state, as centralised as Turkey, and as evidenced in July 2016’s attempted coup, the Turkish police is controlled by, and fiercely loyal to the AKP party. Accordingly, if the state would have had any interest in stopping such instances of violence, they could have successfully impeded many attacks or would have prosecuted their perpetrators in order to deter others from emulating them.

The violence continued after the elections in June until the snap elections in November (for an overview of results, see Sözen 2016). A HDP Law Commission report stated that in August, there were 9 assaults on HDP buildings in cities such as Istanbul, Antalya, Burdur and Adana. In addition to their widespread geographical diffusion,<sup>xxvi</sup> the attacks were of a sustained nature and continued throughout the autumn.<sup>xxvii</sup> The patterns of violence in the post-June elections period exhibit strong continuities with the pre-election period. In September 2015; the HDP filed a series of criminal complaints detailing the extent of the violence to which it was subjected.<sup>xxviii</sup> Our detailed analysis of news reports with regards to attacks show that apart from making headlines in left leaning newspapers, these declarations were not covered by mainstream media outlets. The violence directed against the HDP in this whole period was largely ignored and the media and government politicians reverted to the discourse of outraged Turkish sensibilities, thus implying ultimate blame rested with the provocative actions of the HDP.<sup>xxix</sup> This deliberate media strategy of ignoring or downplaying the systematic targeting of the HDP and Kurds, directly contributes to the perception of immunity for the perpetrators of violence.

Events in Kırşehir, a predominantly AKP and MHP voting town<sup>xxx</sup> in central Anatolia, encapsulate the rising trend of communal violence. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, the HDP's local branch building and 32 shops were set ablaze by a group of people who were allegedly organizing a march to 'condemn PKK terrorism'.<sup>xxxi</sup> It is locally believed that the *Ottoman Hearths* were behind these attacks.<sup>xxxii</sup> The perpetrators possessed a list of individuals and places to be attacked. As Horowitz highlights, during communal riots the utilisation of bureaucratic-like lists indicates a significant degree of preparation (2001, 228). The attacks lasted for 7 hours and at no point did the police attempt to intervene. The police station is located 70 meters away from the HDP building rendering it impossible for to police to have been unaware of the violence.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

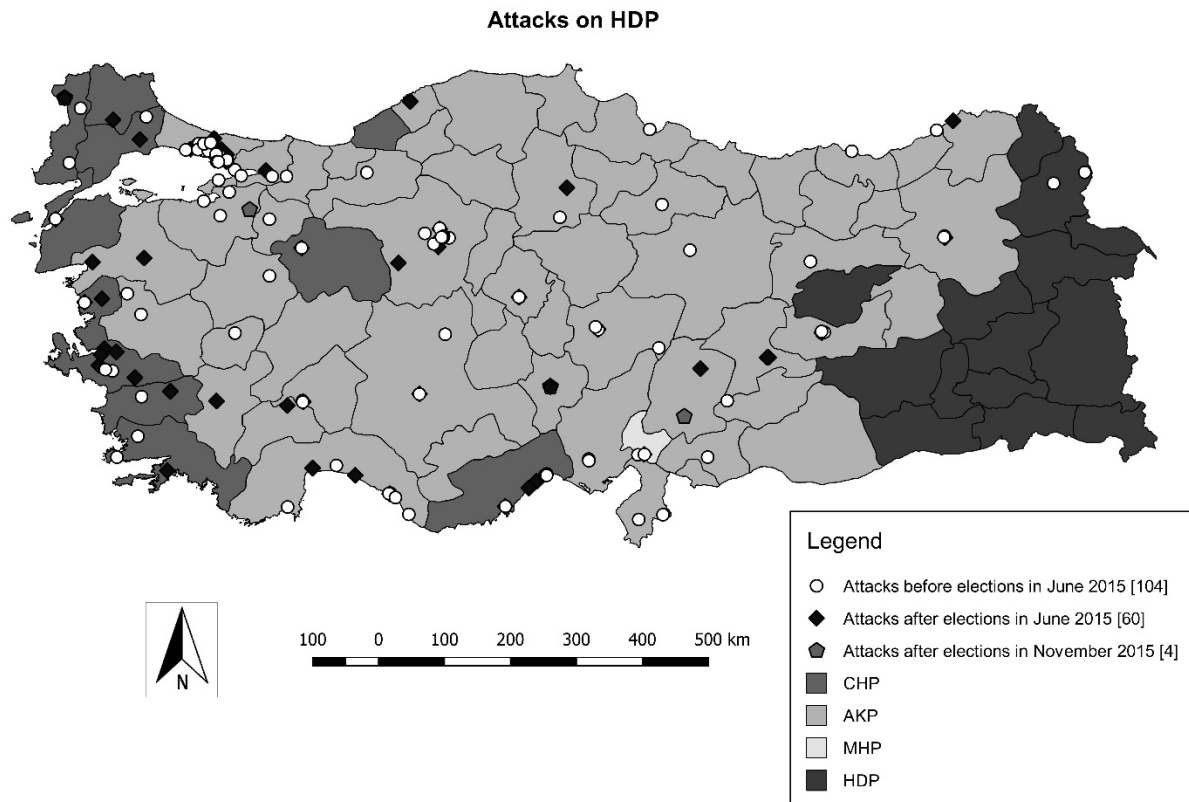
After the incident, the CHP conducted an official inquiry and established that municipal vehicles toured the city many times on the day before the attacks calling on the residents to pay tribute to the martyrs killed by the PKK and to condemn terrorism. The report suggests that the authorities were well-informed about a potential threat from Ottoman Hearths and *Ülkücüs*, but they chose not to deploy extra security measures. They simply stationed a few policemen outside the HDP headquarters who ultimately did not intervene to prevent the



violence. The number of attackers were said to have numbered around 7000, confirming that this was not a spontaneous outburst. The report stated that ‘men in white shirts whom ‘no one knew’ directed the crowd according to lists they possessed, encouraging the burning of businesses with Kurdish and leftist owners’. According to the testimonies, the Governor, Necati Şentürk, climbed on an armoured police vehicle and sang the national anthem together with marchers, further encouraging the mob. Furthermore, the report confirms that the attackers ‘exchanged posts on Facebook to locate the victims and finding places to attack’. The attackers also cut the pipe of the fire engine to prevent the quenching of the blaze. Only four arrests have been since reported.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

A most interesting aspect of these attacks is their geographical diffusion. Wilkinson argues that communal violence can be used as a tool to consolidate ethno-religious block voting and that this can occur at a broader national level but also in individual constituencies where ethnic or religious balances confer lesser or greater importance on ethnic cleavages. Parties can engineer events with the hope of provoking a counter-reaction from the targeted group. Such a counter reaction, especially if it is violent in nature would then ‘polarize the majority ethnic group behind the political party that has the strongest anti-minority identity’ (2005, 4). Violence is thought to be most common in areas of close competition for seats (Wilkinson 2005, 16). Yet, as evidenced in Figure 1<sup>xxxv</sup>, most of the violence was in areas where the HDP had little or no hope of winning a seat and was with the exception of two cases completely absent in areas where the HDP was the dominant party and had the most acute rivalry with the formerly dominant AKP. Figure 1. shows the electoral results at the provincial level rather than the district level. The provinces attributed to a particular party do not mean that that party won every seat in the province but only a majority of the seats.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Figure 1. Attacks on HDP and Electoral Results



Admittedly, there is a strong concentration of attacks in cities like Izmir and Istanbul where the HDP did win seats, so Wilkinson's argument about the relationship between competition and violence might be more relevant in those specific urban cases. However, it cannot be generalised to the national context. As can be seen in Figure 1, attacks were widespread in central Anatolia, coastal regions and the north of the country where the HDP anticipated and obtained very low vote preferences, thus reinforcing the pattern whereby, with the exclusion of large urban centres with significant Kurdish populations, the highest level of anti-Kurdish violence occurs in areas where the HDP had limited electoral support (Borsuk 2015). Considering the data, it seems convincing that the logic of violence was nationally oriented rather than locally related, ruling out Wilkinson's understanding formulated in the Indian context (2005, 16). There was a determination on behalf of the government to prevent the HDP from passing the ten per cent threshold. The more the HDP adopted an all-embracing Turkey wide and less Kurdish-oriented discourse, the more it was perceived as an electoral threat by its party rivals. These party elites in the MHP and AKP promoted broader anti-Kurdish hostility, thus bridging elite and grassroots anti-Kurdish sentiment. The polarising strategy seems to have worked for the AKP, and it returned to power with a greater majority in the November 2015 election. The HDP lost a significant percentage of its vote but still managed to scrape past the threshold (Sözen 2016). Many Kurds abstained from voting or

switched support back to the AKP as they viewed as it the best way, regardless of their actual political preferences to bring about an end to violence.<sup>xxxvii</sup> This preference for stability over insecurity is common in elections in conflict societies (Höglund 2009, 415).

### **Communal Violence against Kurdish Individuals and Groups**

Kurds in western Turkey have long been the victims of everyday discrimination and varying forms of violence (Gambetti 2013). However, this form of violence has become more prominent, as Borsuk argues ‘the communal attacks against the Kurds came into public limelight in the second half of the 2000s as many journalists and scholars began to discuss lynching incidents against the Kurds that were more frequent in Western cities in Turkey’ (2016, 132). In addition to the attacks against the HDP targets, mass violence against Kurds, victimised on the basis of their ethnicity rather than any specific expression of political preference, became more widespread during 2015. For instance, according to our data set, more than 60 incidents occurred between April and December 2015, in cities that do not have a Kurdish majority population. These attacks reflected increased antipathy toward Turkey’s Kurdish population in general, derived from the political and media conflation of Kurds as terrorist supporters. Kurdish individuals, groups, workers, students, sports teams and journalists among others were repeatedly targeted. The triggers for these attacks varied from expressions of Kurdish identity such as speaking Kurdish in public, listening or singing in Kurdish, participating in pro-Kurdish protests and events, or traditional celebrations such as Newroz celebrations (Borsuk 2016, 132). The common justification of these attacks was the disturbance of ‘Turkish sensitivities’ or the ‘national reflex’ (Bora 1998).

This ‘national reflex’ revealed itself with the attacks against Kurds across Turkey before and after the elections. In January 2015, in Niğde in Central Anatolia, a student residence housing three Kurdish students was stoned by a group of 10-15 people.<sup>xxxviii</sup> In July 2015, a group of Kurdish workers in Erzurum were attacked by a nationalist group of more than 2000 people.<sup>xxxix</sup> In September 2015, two people spoke in Kurdish to each other at a bus terminal in Trabzon and were attacked by the passengers around them, suffering serious injuries.<sup>xl</sup> On the third of June, 2016, in Sivas in Central Anatolia, some ultra-nationalist students attacked Kurdish students during an exam.<sup>xli</sup> In Gököy, in the province of Ordu, a group of seasonal workers were attacked on 23 of August, 2016.<sup>xlii</sup>

In one notable incident in the province of Muğla in South Western Turkey, a Kurdish man shared a photo on his social media profile where he was wearing traditional Kurdish clothes. His neighbours mistakenly assumed that these clothes were a guerrilla outfit worn by PKK fighters. Around seventy people gathered and severely beat him, before forcing him to kiss an Atatürk statue in the town square. The perpetrators shared photos of him on social media outlets covered in blood kissing the statue. The open publication of the criminal attack confirms the prevailing sense of impunity in relation to violence against Kurds. This incident happened after the PKK killed a number of soldiers who were from Muğla, highlighting the role of military deaths in provoking communal hostilities. When he was taken to the hospital after the incident, a group of 300 people gathered outside, reputedly to ‘finish him off’. He managed to escape from the hospital and has since left the province.<sup>xliii</sup>

These incidents are justified by their perpetrators because they increasingly view any expression of Kurdish identity as a terrorist act. As Borsuk mentions: ‘The nationalist spirit fed by the war accorded to all Turkish citizens a vigilant duty to ‘react against terror’, which targeted not only the PKK but also the expressions of Kurdish identity’ (2016, 141). Perpetrators are usually placated by empathising with their hurt sensitivities, while the victims are usually classed as ‘provocateurs’ by state officials and the police (Bora, 2010). There are numerous examples of these incidents and their spatial distribution is nationwide with the partial exception of the Kurdish region. According to Borsuk (2016, 144): ‘The investigation and prosecution process of communal violence incidents are also difficult to pursue since people often are scared to report the criminals. In many cases, those who report are becoming victims and end up being investigated by the police.’ People are scared to go to the police and other authorities as they fear that the police will open an investigation against them instead of pursuing the perpetrators. There is a wide perception among the victims that there is culture of impunity for individuals that target Kurds in Turkey. As a result, most attacks are not reported and there is accordingly no way of assessing the full extent of the phenomenon.

## **Conclusion**

Although, one must be wary of downplaying violence against Kurds and indeed other minorities in the past, the extent and systematic nature of the violence and its public tolerance mark a deterioration of inter-ethnic co-existence in Turkey. The presence of millions of

Kurds in western Turkey, many of which have ended the deferential behaviour of preceding generations has triggered so-called Turkish sensibilities. Beyond support for the PKK, the growth in popularity of the HDP and a broader Kurdish cultural revival has convinced many Turks of a nationalist persuasion, that the Kurds are no longer ‘future Turks’. The very existence of unabashed Kurds is testament to the failure of the Turkish project of assimilation. This has led to a re-configuration of Turkish nationalism vis-à-vis the Kurdish population which legitimates violence against them.

In this article, we mapped the attacks against the HDP and Kurdish individuals specifically focusing on the period between before the elections of June 2015 and around the snap elections of November 2015. Our research has limitations since we solely relied on newspaper articles, local and national NGO reports as well as a few interviews with HDP officials. We outlined our preliminary findings, hopefully paving the way for deeper discussions on this topic in the future. Drawing on our findings, we argue that the intensification of communal violence during the 2015 elections can be explained by theories of electoral violence and communal riots to a certain extent, however our findings show that the underlying causes of this intensification can be better explained by broader ethnic polarisation in Turkey which has accelerated in recent years and particularly intensified since the failure of the peace process. The fact that intensification of violence occurred in locations where the HDP had almost no chance of winning seats is a clear sign that there were other issues at stake. Rather than seat maximization, the mob violence’s objective was to dissuade the HDP from running for seats in Turkish majority areas. It seems that provided the HDP limited itself to obtaining Kurdish votes, it was begrudgingly permitted to campaign in elections. However, since it has crossed the communal cleavage to actively seek Turkish voters’ support, it has triggered some form of existential anxiety in sizeable parts of Turkish society.

HDP efforts to win support from the Turkish populations has unleashed a form of electoral competition, heretofore absent, where it serves the electoral interests of the AKP and other major parties to trigger a form of communal polarisation in the hope of mobilising the Turkish people against the pernicious ‘Kurdish menace’. To encourage this polarisation, the government, sympathetic media outlets and other nationalist entities has engaged in anti-Kurdish rhetoric conflating any expression of Kurdishness with support for the PKK. The relevant authorities have done little to impede violent actors from attacking the HDP and

other Kurdish targets as it complements juridical efforts to bring about the same objective through the mass detention of Kurdish activists, censorship of all media open to non-partisan arguments regarding the conflict, and quotidian acts of petty municipal interference, such as denying permits to HDP offices. The violence which has so far resulted in a relatively limited number of deaths has encouraged Turkish nationalists to engage in autonomous campaigns and single actions against Kurdish targets. All of which has culminated in mass violence, intimidation and a widened cleavage between the country's Turkish and Kurdish populations.

There are also significant signs that there are pro-government paramilitary groups are emerging all around Turkey as well as in the diaspora, which may in the long run increase the likelihood of this type of communal violence. The crowds that took to the streets to prevent the coup attempt on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July in 2016 were a clear sign that there is at least a sizeable group of volunteers who are happy to be the 'willing executioners' of state imperatives (Gambetti 2013, 167). Recently, a legislative decree by the Turkish government granted judicial immunity to civilians involved in the suppression of terrorist acts. This decree has been vigorously contested by the opposition and progressive civil society groups in Turkey. Moreover, in Germany a group of Turkish-background youth found a group called *Osmanen Germania* were established and are subject to an ongoing police investigation (Winter, 2017).

Remarkably, only a few years ago Abdullah Ocalan, the leader of the PKK had called for a withdrawal of PKK guerrilla forces from Turkey. Now, not only has the insurgency re-erupted, it has spread to Kurdish cities and the entire Turkish state is wracked by communal violence. As Horowitz argues, in areas where there are recurrent ethnic riots there is a tendency for them to become routinized. He claims that: 'targets, initially chosen highly selectively, broaden out significantly. Locations of violence also proliferate. The episodic characters of the riot event give way to something less discrete and incessant. The violence becomes more organised and less spontaneous. There are tendencies to greater severity and to more casualties over time' (Horowitz 2001, 412). Thus, the outlook for an end to the conflict is bleak. It seems unlikely that the Turkish President and the governing party, emboldened and strengthened by surviving the coup attempt, will concede the institutional opening for the Kurdish movement to struggle by the mundane route of electoral politics, thereby convincing many Kurdish youths that their emancipation will come by following the footsteps of their brothers and sisters in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s to the mountains.

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<sup>i</sup> A handful of AKP politicians warned against accusing the AKP of the attacks, declaring that they condemned the attacks. See: <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/akp-li-vekil-hdp-ye-saldirilar-kabul-edilemez-139991.html> (Retrieved 20 January 2018).

<sup>ii</sup> The MHP is a far-right party, arguably comparable to neo-fascist parties in Europe (see Yavuz, 2002).

<sup>iii</sup> Since late 2015, the YDG-H has become known as the YPS (Civil Protection Units/*Yekîneyên Parastina Sivîl*) and has been more closely integrated to the PKK's armed structures.

<sup>iv</sup> As evidenced in Figure 1.

<sup>v</sup> The AKP's relationship with the Kurds is not limited to its reactions against the HDP. The AKP also has a sizeable Kurdish voter base and has good relations with other political groups in Kurdish majority areas. A considerable number of AKP MPs are Kurdish. For more information on AKP's relations with the Kurds in general, see Gürbüz (2017).

<sup>vi</sup> Hürriyet, Milliyet, Evrensel, Birgün, Sendika.org, T24, CNN Turk, BBC, Rudaw, DHA, IMC, Posta, Internethaber.

<sup>vii</sup> We would like to thank the anonymous HDP member from Istanbul who made this possible.

<sup>viii</sup> Several Turkish news websites also published a chronology of attacks against the HDP, which helped us make map as comprehensive as possible. <http://t24.com.tr/haber/iste-7-haziran-secimi-oncesinde-turkiye-capinda-hdpye-yapilan-saldirilarin-kronolojisi,297012>

(Retrieved in January 2017).

<sup>ix</sup> We thank the anonymous HDP member who sent us these reports that are prepared by the HDP and presented to the Turkish Parliament as well as media outlets.

<sup>x</sup> See a declaration by the Vice Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan on the HDP's role as a 'pawn of the PKK'. <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/akdogan-bunlar-zaten-pkknin-uzantisi-186368.html> (Retrieved in January 2018)

<sup>xi</sup> 'Kurdish Party Leader Selahattin Demirtas Defiant in Face of Threats'. *Financial Times*, 4 August 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017).

<sup>xii</sup> Alevis were understood as being Muslims.

<sup>xiii</sup> See: [http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20130109171358\\_turkiyenin-kurt-sorunu-algisi.pdf](http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20130109171358_turkiyenin-kurt-sorunu-algisi.pdf) (Retrieved in January 2017).

<sup>xiv</sup> 'Attacks on Syrians in Turkey Increasing', *Al-Monitor*, 20 May 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017).

- <sup>xv</sup> ‘Seim Srecinde Siyasi Partilere Ynelik Saldırılar Seim Gvenlięinin olmadıęını Gstermektedir.’, *İHD*, 20 May 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017). In a subsequent declaration, İHD updated the statistics and gives the following numbers: 7 armed, 5 bomb and 4 arson attacks. ‘HDP’ye Ynelik Bombalı ve Silahlı Saldırıları Kınıyor, Sorumluları Lanetleniyoruz’, *İHD*, 6 June 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xvi</sup> ‘İHD: Seim srecinde yapılan 126 saldırının 114’nn hedefi HDP’ydi’, *T24*, 20 May 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xvii</sup> ‘HDP’ye Ynelik Bombalı ve Silahlı Saldırıları Kınıyor, Sorumluları Lanetleniyoruz’, *İHD*, 6 June 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xviii</sup> See: ‘HDP’ye yapılan saldırılar ve cezasızlık sistemli mi?’, *Platform24*, 17 May 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xix</sup> See for instance, ‘HDP’ye 3’ bombalı 112 saldırı dzenlendi’, *Baris iin Aktivite*, 7 June 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xx</sup> ‘HDP’ye Yapılan Saldırılar ve Cezasızlık Sistemli Mi?’, *Platform for Independent Journalism*. 17 May 2015. . (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xxi</sup> ‘HDP’ye 3’ bombalı 112 saldırı dzenlendi’, *Baris iin Aktivite*, 7 June 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xxii</sup> ‘Fethiye’de geen yıl saldırıya ugrayan HDP’ye kiralık bina yok’, *T24*, 25 February 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xxiii</sup> ‘HDP’ye yapılan saldırılar ve cezasızlık sistemli mi?’, *Platform24*, 17 May 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Alperens are associated with the BBP (*Buyuk Birlik Partisi/* Great Unity Party), which is an ultra-nationalist party with a strong commitment to İslam.
- <sup>xxv</sup> ‘HDP’ye Ynelik Bombalı ve Silahlı Saldırıları Kınıyor, Sorumluları Lanetleniyoruz’, *İHD*, 6 June 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xxvi</sup> ‘Civilian Losses and Assaults at HDP Offices in Numbers (Law Commission Report 17 June- 26August)’, *HDPEnglish*, 13 September 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xxvii</sup> ‘Attacks Against the Peoples’ Democratic Party (Since September 6<sup>th</sup> 2015)’, *HDPEnglish*, 12 September 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xxviii</sup> ‘The Criminal Complaint Filed against the Perpetrators of the Attack on Our HQ’, *HDPEnglish*, 10 September 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)
- <sup>xxix</sup> ‘HDP’ye saldırıları nlemeyen polis: İyi ki ge gelmiřiz!’, *DIHA*, 11 May 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)

<sup>xxx</sup> In November 2015 elections, the AKP received 50.7% of the votes while in June it only received 39,6 %. The MHP received 24,3% of the votes in November 2015 elections, while in June its percentage was 32,2. It is clear that the AKP managed to get votes from MHP's voter base. The HDP received % 4,7 in November 2015 elections while in June it received %6,1 of the votes.

<sup>xxxi</sup> 'Kırşehir'deki Madımak: Gül Kitabevi'nin yakılmasına ilişkin yeni görüntüler yayınlandı', *Evrensel*, 19 October 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)

<sup>xxxii</sup> 'Who is behind violence against the Kurds?', *Al-Monitor*, 26 October 2015. . (Retrieved in January 2017)

<sup>xxxiii</sup> 'Kırşehir gerçeği: Listeyle yakmışlar', *Hürriyet*, 22 October 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)

<sup>xxxiv</sup> See 'Who is behind violence against the Kurds?', *Al-Monitor*, 26 October 2015. . (Retrieved in January 2017). For more information on CHP's report see <http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/chp-raporu-kirsehirdeki-tek-toma-saldirganlar-serinlesin-diye-su-sikti-1455989/> (Retrieved in January 2017). Also see [http://bianet.org/bianet/toplum/168507-chp-den-kirsehir-raporu-basiretsiz-bir-yonetim-anlayisi-hakim-oldu?bia\\_source=rss](http://bianet.org/bianet/toplum/168507-chp-den-kirsehir-raporu-basiretsiz-bir-yonetim-anlayisi-hakim-oldu?bia_source=rss) (Retrieved in January 2017).

<sup>xxxv</sup> This map is based on open source data gathered in the open access Google map detailing the attacks. It includes the original media sources for each attack. It is available here: <https://www.google.de/maps/search/turkey+at+war/@50.5800097,8.6730901,15z?hl=en>

<sup>xxxvi</sup> For e.g. in Diyarbakir the HDP with 79.06 per cent of the vote returned ten deputies and the AKP with 14.00 per cent returned one deputy.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> 'After Big Win in June, Why Did HDP Lose This Time?', *Al-Monitor*, 5 November 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)

<sup>xxxviii</sup> 'Niğde'de Kürt Öğrencilerin Evine Taşlı Saldırı', *Bianet*, 2 January 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017).

<sup>xxxix</sup> See Borsuk (2015) for an analysis on the specific targeting of seasonal workers.

<sup>xl</sup> 'Trabzon'da 2 kişiyi Kürtçe konuşurlar diye linç etmek istediler', *Evrensel*, 09 September 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)

<sup>xli</sup> 'Sivas'ta Kürt öğrencilere polis desteğiyle linç girişimi', *Sendika.org*, 3 June 2016. (Retrieved in January 2017)

<sup>xlii</sup> 'Ordu'da Kürt işçilere saldırı', *IMC*, 23 August 2016. (Retrieved in January 2017)

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<sup>xliii</sup> ‘Muğla’da zorla Atatürk büstü öptürülen İbrahim Çay: Jandarma işin içinde’, *Evrensel*, 11September 2015. (Retrieved in January 2017)